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Happy New Year!

Mechanical Memories Magazine

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Editorial

Hello, and a very happy New Year to you all. As you can see, the 'must get the magazine out on time' New Year's resolution hasn't quite worked again. In fairness, I've felt bloody rough with a stinking cold for two weeks, and to be honest, couldn't have cared less about the magazine! (I'm sure I've used that excuse before – must be the time of the year). Anyway, here it is at long last, and with any luck, you should receive it in January (although only just).

Now, you know what they say: start the year as you mean to go on.....so, it's been some time since I last had a nag about articles for the magazine. Please do try to make a contribution if you can. Write about your favourite machine or even your entire collection; your latest acquisition or maybe the one that got away. Anything!

And talking about articles, I had intended writing a piece about the future of our seaside vintage penny arcades for this issue (you'll probably remember I mentioned it last year). Unfortunately, because I've been so desperately ill (am I getting any sympathy here)? it will have to wait for another time. However, I should just mention a couple of arcades that have now closed. As most of you will know by now, Clive lost his site on Southport pier after Easter last year. He was able to open a smaller arcade on the North pier at Blackpool by mid summer, but it didn't last long – in fact, it didn't even last until Christmas. In addition, Darren's arcade at the Cheshire candle workshops closed down towards the end of last year. As for Brighton.....less said, the better.

Well, that's about it for now

Until next time, all the best

Jerry

Front Cover Picture:

Detail of the *Pharos* fortune teller at Rye – see Stuart's article on page 14.

Dreamland

MARGATE

Save Dreamland Update January 2013

DREAMLAND APPEAL - COURT DATE SET

On Thursday 20th December 2012 Thanet District Council was successful in its application to have the Dreamland Compulsory Purchase Order (CPO) appeal prioritised. A two day hearing will now take place on Wednesday 20th and Thursday 21st March 2013. If the appeal by the landowners is unsuccessful, Thanet District Council will immediately begin the process of acquiring ownership of the site.

The council received approval from the Secretary of State for the Compulsory Purchase of the site in August 2012, following a public inquiry. The landowners then challenged the decision by the Secretary of State. January 2013 marks 10 years since I set up the Save Dreamland Campaign. Hard to believe.

10 YEARS OF THE SAVE DREAMLAND CAMPAIGN

I thought I would be a little self-indulgent in this month's MMM article by writing a few words about how it all started.

My direct involvement in Dreamland actually dates back to May 2001, when I wrote to the Department of Culture, Media and Sport and requested that the Scenic Railway be spot listed. I had become aware of the historic importance of the ride due to a growing personal and professional interest in the history of British amusement parks through my work as planning consultant to various theme parks around the UK. My report provided background context to the Scenic Railway, showing that it was a remarkable and rare survivor of a ride that was once common in the UK. It noted that the Scenic Railway could be under threat due to the fact that a third of Dreamland had been cleared and I had heard rumours that the owner may be looking to close the park. In my report, I stated that the ride should be protected, as there was a strong likelihood it would otherwise be lost to redevelopment.

A year later, the ride was listed Grade II. There was some media interest at the time and I did a number of newspaper and radio interviews. I thought that was the end of it.

In early January 2003, local press reported that the owner of Dreamland was considering closing Dreamland and redeveloping it. As I don't live in Margate I was not immediately aware of this, but received a number of emails from people who, remembering my involvement in the listing of the Scenic Railway, asked if I could help, as they were worried at the effects that the closure of Dreamland would have on Margate.

I set up the Save Dreamland Campaign on 7th January 2003 as a small website on which to gather names and to allow me to make representations to the Council to ensure that the park was appropriately protected in the Local Plan. My initial approach was to lobby the Council to ask them to ensure that the site was properly protected as an amusement park in the Local Plan.

A number of organisations joined the Campaign in the early weeks, including SAVE Britain's Heritage, the Margate Historical Society, the Margate Civic Society, the Margate Hotel & Guest House Association, Fairground Association of Great Britain, American Coaster Enthusiasts, the European Coaster Club and the Roller Coaster Club of Great Britain. The launch of the Campaign was covered in the local, national and international press.



On 17th January 2003, it was reported that the owner of Dreamland had concluded a deal to sell the site to East Yorkshire-based developers Stadium Developments Limited. According to press reports, Stadium proposed to redevelop the entire site and the development would include a supermarket, hotel, casino, swimming pool and children's play area. The Scenic Railway was to be demolished as part of these plans. It was stated that Stadium had been in talks with Thanet Council about the redevelopment of the site since before Christmas.

In an interview with amusement park industry magazine Park World, the owner of Dreamland, Jim Godden, stated that he was closing Dreamland to enable him to "take life easier". The article cited the "commercial value of the land" as one of the reasons that Godden planned to close both Dreamland in Margate and the Rotunda in Folkestone at the end of the 2003 season. In the interview, Godden admitted that if he were to sell either Dreamland or the Rotunda as a going concern, "the price I would sell at would have no bearing as to their true commercial development land value." He also revealed in the interview that his plans were a "purely commercial decision" and added "it may well be the start of things to come when you are looking at a lot of coastal amusement parks and their development values".

In the first few weeks of the Campaign, Sarah Vickery (owner of the Grade I listed Shell Grotto, who has played a huge role in the Campaign through the years) and I met with Thanet District Council officers, councillors and the local MP, Roger Gale.

On 28th February 2003, Sarah Vickery and I met with Council Leader, Cllr Richard Nicholson. At this meeting Mr Nicholson told us that he believed the site must remain a tourist destination, but at the same meeting gave us a new draft of the Council's Local Plan policy on Dreamland which allowed for its complete closure and redevelopment. We were stunned by what we saw, especially as the Council's recent consultation on the plan had shown that the vast majority of residents wanted Dreamland to be protected in the Plan as an amusement park. He explained that the reason the Council had amended it was because the owner had written to them.

On 4th April 2003, a large fire destroyed Mr G's Amusement Arcade on Margate Seafront, as well as damaging the neighbouring Funland Arcade. These arcades back onto the Dreamland site. Mr G's was owned by Jimmy Godden, the owner of Dreamland. The fire created a gap in the frontage of the Dreamland site that approximately corresponded to the planned access road into the Dreamland site on a plan that the owners had provided to the Council at a meeting in December 2002. This would be the first of three large fires at Dreamland.



Save Dreamland Convention, June 2003.

In April 2003, Dreamland reopened for the 2003 season, operated by showman David Wallis, who supplemented the remaining rides (many had been sold off since December 2002) with his own rides. The Scenic Railway was operated this year by an informal organisation called the Scenic Railway Trust, and opened from May. By the end of the year, operator David Collard confirmed to the Save Dreamland Campaign that the ride made a profit, despite not being part of the wristband scheme operating across the rest of the park.

During 2003, the Campaign was contacted by two theme park operators that confirmed their interest in acquiring Dreamland and operating it as a going concern. The first of these was Grévin & Cie, a Paris-based theme park operator that operated a number of sites around Europe and contacted the Campaign in April. They visited the site in April 2003 and made an offer to acquire the site. The owner refused this offer because it was below residential and retail development value. The second operator was the owner of Southend's successful Adventure Island amusement park, Philip Miller, who contacted the Campaign in November 2003. Mr Miller had the park independently valued by Humberts Leisure and made an offer for the park at that valuation. The offer was refused by Dreamland Leisure because in their view it seriously undervalued the site. This reinforced our belief that it was necessary for the Local Plan to protect Dreamland; otherwise it was unlikely that a tourist attraction operator would be able to compete with the values that were being sought for residential or retail development. The operator of Dreamland in the 2003 season, David Wallis, also told the Isle of Thanet Gazette on 4 April 2003 that he believed Dreamland to be viable.

On 30th November 2003, six fire engines attended a fire that had broken out on the Waltzer ride at Dreamland. The ride was completely destroyed. By the end of the Save Dreamland Campaign's first year, Dreamland had seen two fires, the Local Plan had been amended in an unhelpful way, but the people of Margate had come together and were not going to let this happen without a fight.

Nick Laister

Nick Laister (Chairman, The Dreamland Trust)

www.dreamlandmargate.com
www.savedreamland.co.uk

Blackpool Then & Now

by John Burke

For over 200 years, Blackpool has been Britain's number-one holiday resort - brash, noisy and unashamedly full of fun. Progress is Blackpool's motto, and here we can see for ourselves the contrast between the Edwardian resort and the modern one. Blackpool has been enjoyed by the millions of visitors who come every year to sample the beach, the fun fair, the Tower and the razz-ma-tazz of the famous Golden Mile. Victorian and Edwardian postcards here reveal the Blackpool of our great-great grandparents, set alongside specially taken views of today's refurbished modern resort town setting itself to compete against the rest of the world's holiday destinations.

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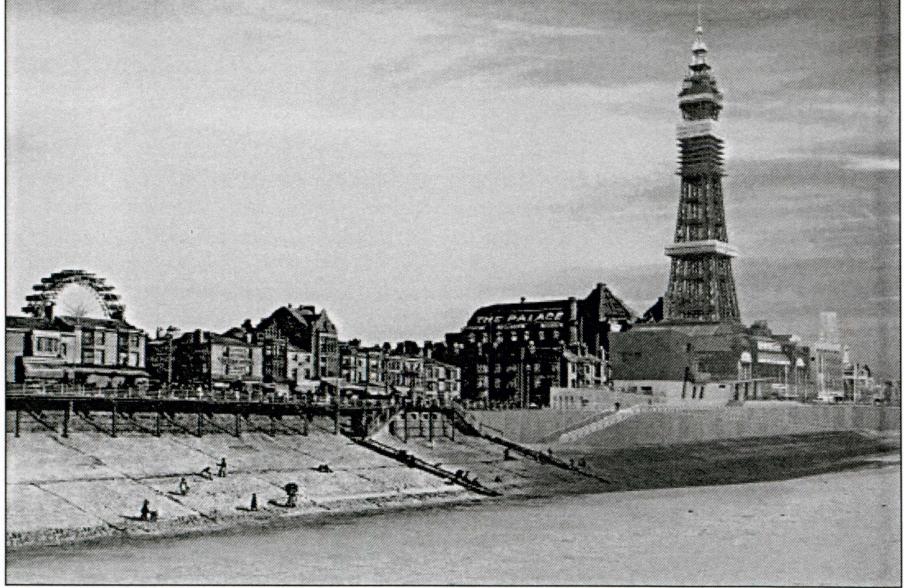


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BLACKPOOL THEN & NOW

IN COLOUR

JOHN BURKE





The Things We Do For Love

By John Peterson

It is said love makes fools of us all. Normally such assessment is made at the end of a relationship, not the beginning. Hindsight is always so much clearer than foresight. Experience is not necessarily the saving grace either. Otherwise, there would be no such thing as remarriage after divorce. But what a sadder place the world would be without love and the foolish things we do for it. Today's tale is one such story.

Photo A (opposite) is my latest acquisition. It appeared on Ebay as a truncated five-day auction. The seller had done his homework. The piece was correctly described as a "*super rare vintage Bussoz – Paris France 'Exclusive Automatics,' a construecteur coin operated arcade game.*" The 'super rare' part of the description was a bit of a stretch but the attribution was correct. This is a Pierre Bussoz roulette game originally named 'La Girouette' from the early 20th Century.

The three spinning panels were originally painted with barnyard animals. A number of these games were exported to England where they were revamped to accept the large British penny. The graphics were also changed from animals to pin-ups. The name given this 'new' machine was 'Exclusive Automatics.' The machine being offered for sale was one of these British revamps. I know the game fairly well for I own one that I purchased from a nice lad in England years ago, **Photo B**.

The auction started at the nominal offering of \$9.99. I was interested, of course. The ad stated that the door was locked with no key. There was no way to ascertain the completeness of the mechanism, although the seller did include the ever helpful opinion that "this one is in fantastic physical condition and appears to be complete with the entire mechanism inside (from what I can tell without removing the back.)" He also stated "I have not tried it since the photo plates are not present nor do I have the correct coins as I don't know what they would have been and didn't want to jam it."

Looking at the game with what I like to think is a more experienced eye, I could see that certain pieces of the hardware were garden variety replacements, including the actual garden spigot handle parading as a turn knob. This does not inspire confidence. Hoping to learn more, I emailed the seller and asked for background concerning the previous owner. Might I have his telephone number so I could hear first-hand what other improvements he had made? The seller informed me that the previous owner, an elderly gentleman, had recently died. His grandson was the one who presented the game to the seller, saying, "Granddad got the machine running just fine."

To recap, I'm looking at a quite rare French game that is locked, of unknown completeness, with monkey parts put on by a now dead man who also *glued* a particle board backing to an historic game of 100 years of age. Why aren't I hearing alarm bells? To make things even more interesting, over the short course of our discussions, the seller, out of the blue, informs me that the auction is going so poorly that he intends to stop the auction and sell the game to a local party who has offered \$650 and will pick up the game in person, relieving the seller of any packing obligation. Finally, he informs me that if I'm interested in the machine, it might be mine but only if I "show him the love."

Love. In my dictionary, a synonym for 'love' is 'trouble.' The only real question running through my mind at this point is: how much trouble? There is the trouble of physically picking up the machine, an eighteen-hour round trip from my house. There is the trouble of getting into the locked cabinet. Then there is the biggest potential trouble of all...what exactly is the completeness of this game? There are cardboard cards covering the painted panels. It's a safe bet the pictures on the panels will have to be reconstructed. But what else? It is, to my mind, a pig in a poke. Should I bite?



Photo B

I posed this very question to the members of the erudite internet site, Pennymachines.co.uk. It ran in the form of a survey, asking for a vote. Was I a goat or a genius? Slightly over half voted 'genius' and the rest 'goat' or 'not sure.' In other words, an even split. In addition to questioning the distance required to collect the machine, the main reservations were with the unknown condition of the mechanism, if there even was a mechanism.

The short answer is yes; there is a mechanism. The longer answer is that parts of the mechanism are missing. The missing parts are crucial to the proper operation of the game. In addition to the missing parts, coloured cardboard inserts are glued to each of the three spinning panels on either side. The cardboard sticks out far enough to impede any possibility of the panels spinning. There is no way that this machine operated in its present state. Someone along the custodial chain was completely wrong; Granddad, grandson, seller,...someone. I am not saying that the game was deliberately misrepresented but the information presented in the ad was incorrect to a major degree.

When I agreed to the seller's price of \$750, I went under the assumption that the game was not working (contrary to the Ebay hype) and that there would be parts missing. I was only hoping that the missing items were not too sophisticated or complex. My hunch was correct. The parts absent from La Girouette are fairly minor. The saving grace is the complete machine that I already own. I can see not only what is missing but how the parts interact. Without my pre-existing example, the restoration process would be exceedingly difficult and certainly beyond my modest mechanical skills. As it stands, I believe I can bring this game back to life under my own hand.

And what of the 1,283 mile drive to acquire the game? Rather than being a minus, the drive was a plus. This is because my dear brother lives directly on my route to the seller, three hours short of destination. In addition to a welcome visit, my brother has been holding a family heirloom for me, a handgun formerly owned by our father. Handguns may not legally be mailed to private citizens in the United States. I had been looking for an excuse to personally retrieve this prize from my brother for some time. This was the excuse I had been seeking.

Love. It changes the chemistry in our brain and makes us do crazy things. Knowing now what I do about my most recent love, do I regret my decision? Absolutely not. I now own two of these fascinating games, one of which works and one with future promise. You can finish the sentence for me: "It is better to have loved and lost than..."

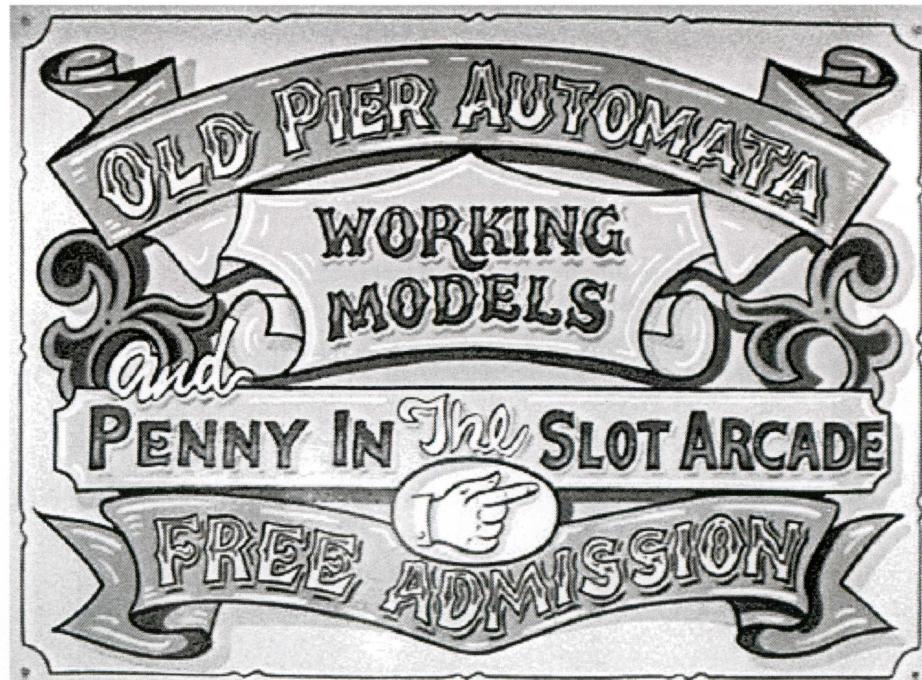
I think you will agree.

John Peterson, USA

Rye Heritage Centre

By Stuart Dale

This month I thought I would introduce you to a collection of working models that are on display at the Rye Heritage Centre in East Sussex. Rye is a small village situated on the A259 between Hastings and Folkestone, and is set a mile or so inland from the south coast overlooking Romney Marsh. I have been to many vintage arcades over the past few years, but I have never seen so many working models on display in one place before. The collection is privately owned by Steve Maxted, and is on permanent display in an upstairs room in the Heritage Centre. The vintage arcade is open all the year round and it is free to enter. There are 22 full size working models and a few other vintage machines like the Steer-a-Ball, Mutoscope and a fortune telling machine. All the machines are still on the old penny play, and a plentiful supply can be had from the change machines or from the Heritage shop downstairs.



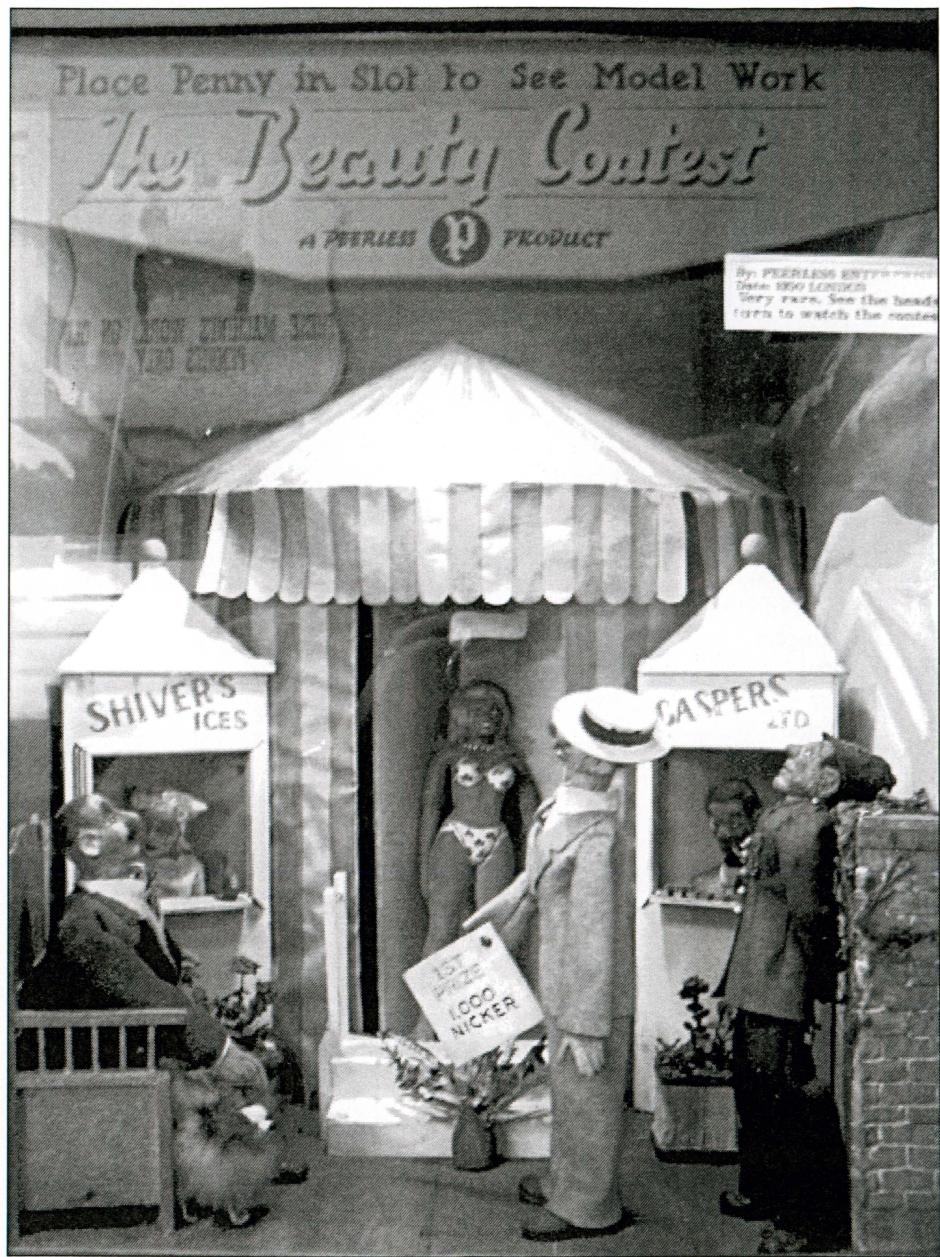
I have compiled a list of the machines I saw on the day:

WORKING MODLES and AUTOMATA

The Haunted Churchyard (Bolland)
The Haunted Churchyard (Kraft)
The Miser
The Drunkards Dream
The Burglar
The Beauty Contest
The Night watchman
Davy Jones Locker
Our Fire fighters
The English Execution
Cry Baby
The Laughing Sailor
Smokey Joe
Sidney Knows
Reading Of the Will
The Chamber of Horrors
The Bell Ringers
The Haunted Grange
Pharos
The Guillotine
Charlie & Mabel in the Park
Cupid's Post Office

VINTAGE SLOT MACHINES

The Twins
Mutoscope
Predicta
Payramid
Allwin
Bryan's Allwin
Bryan's Fruit Bowl
Steer-a-Ball
Grip test
Pussy Shooter



Detail of the Peerless Beauty Contest.

The Beauty Contest machine was one that I have never come across before; this very rare machine was made in the 1950s by Peerless Enterprises. On depositing your penny in the slot, a series of scantily clad contestants parade in front of the judges, but watch out for contestant No. 3, I don't think she was quite ready for the contest!!

Another machine that I thought to be unusual was the Pharaohs Tomb (spelt *Pharos* on the machine). It had all the usual moving parts of a typical working model, but before you put in your penny, you are asked to select a question for the Pharaoh to answer. When the machine finally stops, it delivers you a card with a 'personal' prediction printed on it.

The Haunted Grange is a very rare machine, thought to be the only one in existence, and made around 1905 in Blackpool by Nelson Lee. It would have worked from a clockwork motor when first made, but was converted to electric operation at some point in its history. If you like the Haunted theme there are also two versions of the haunted churchyard working model that were ready to take your penny. The first was made by Fred Bolland around 1952, and the second machine is by Kraft Automatics and is a little later in date, around 1954.



From left: a row of Bolland working models and Ahrens Our Fire Fighters. Ahrens English Execution (centre background). Twins and Pussy Shooter (right foreground).

The machine called Charlie & Mabel in the park, shows a young couple sitting on a park bench and clowning around. The young couple is of course Charlie Chaplin with his distinctive cane and hat & Mabel Normand, Charlie's onetime leading lady. Not sure of the age of this machine, but Mabel Normand died in 1930, so I would think it pre dates that? If anyone knows for sure please tell Jerry so he can run an update on this article.

So if you are ever down on the south coast you must pay this collection a visit. The only downside was the fact that Heritage Centre doesn't have its own cafe, but both Mrs Dale and I can recommend the *Kettle-o-Fish* fish & chip restaurant, which is only a few yards up the road next to the car park.

Stuart Dale



Another line of working models, including: Laughing Sailor, Bolland Haunted Churchyard, Arnold Bell Ringers and Bolland Davy Jones Locker

Strange but True Part 1

By Robert Rowland

When decimalisation arrived in 1971, most arcades either sold or scrapped a high percentage of their machines; not Marine Pastimes arcade in Mablethorpe. Marine had a massive area at the rear of the building, as well as an upstairs area, which was accessible by stairs or lift. A lot of the smaller machines were taken upstairs and quite a few larger machines were moved into a maze of old sheds at the back.

I was very friendly with the owner's mum, and in the 1980s I used to park my motor bike at her house at the back of the arcade. I could see machines piled up in some of the sheds, and one day she showed me inside a few. They were full of machines that I had first seen as a kid back in 1965. The two Tutty Fruities were there, a Monkey Climb, a Marathon Cycle Racer, other two-player games, loads of cranes and much much more.

Those sheds seemed a little unsafe, and a lot of the machines were suffering from damp and water damage from rain seeping in. One particular summer in the 1980s, a number of break-ins started to occur; not in the arcade itself but in the run-down sheds at the back, and some of the smaller machines were being taken. This happened a few times, and I remember on a number of occasions during that summer the owner and his son, plus a friend, camped out in those sheds all night, hoping to catch the culprits red-handed; but they never did. Over a period of time, more stuff was taken, prompting the owner to put up steel bars with sharp jagged pointed tops and barbed wire on top. That ended the break-ins.

Moving forward to the summer of 2009, I was chatting with the owner's son, as I had just bought a 3d Bingolett and a 1d Astra from him. Out of the blue, he asked, "Do you want to see all the machines upstairs?" This was unheard of, as only the staff were ever allowed upstairs. It was a sight I will never forget; a massive room above the arcade, filled with pre 1971 machines, all piled on top of each other. To be honest, there were that many you could hardly move or see anything clearly, but there were hundreds of machines. I was just checking an old allwin, when unfortunately, the owner appeared, and he didn't look too pleased that I was up there. "It's all staying up here," he said (not true, because I had already had stuff from up here).

This was the same owner, who in the 1990s was chatting to a USA visitor, and this chap said, "I want to buy one of your Rock-Ola World's Fair Jigsaws." (The arcade had sixteen in operation at the time). He opened his chequebook and said, "write your price on this blank cheque." But the owner declined. In truth, he just wouldn't sell anything.

My good friend David Lascelles worked there for twenty-five years, and he recalls the day the owner smashed up half a dozen old Mutoscope viewers with a hammer and threw them all in a skip. But after David had done his twenty-five years in the arcade, he asked if he could buy one of the allwins upstairs, as a sort of memento. The owner said, "What do you want one of those for? They're no good, they're on old money, it's not worth anything." Despite David's efforts and all the work he had done, he never got one!

When the millennium came along, there was some sort of payment to be made to the council regarding out buildings, so they decided to knock down all the old sheds at the rear of the Marine arcade. A lot of the surviving machines were moved to their sister arcade, Jacksons Radio (the arcade had closed but the building was still OK). I saw every machine that came out of those sheds. I liked an old two-player football game, but the metal had gone white with corrosion. Most of these machines were very badly water damaged from years of neglect – they were literally falling to bits, rust and woodworm everywhere. I've sent Jerry a picture, taken by the arcade mechanic; it shows the condition of that football game. It was still a thrill to see to actually see all those machines from my past.



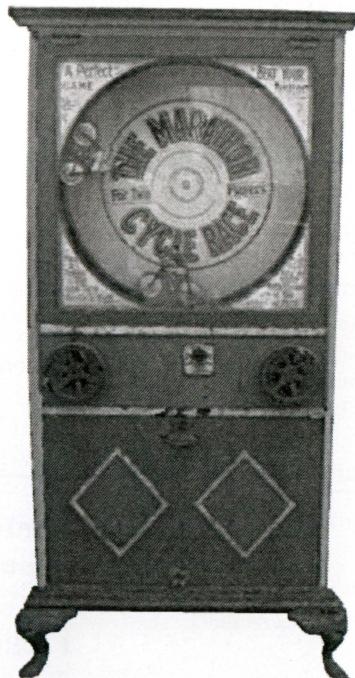
Essex two-player Football machine.

Sadly, the arcade owner passed away in the winter of 2009, and his demise signalled the end for all those machines that he had stored away almost forty years earlier. Within two years, the whole lot from the sheds and upstairs had been sold by the son to a dealer. This dealer got some good stuff – an Ahrens Pile Driver, a Lighthouse Grip, two fireman up a ladder two-player game, to name a few.

However, I know the son, and he doesn't give this sort of stuff away. I was talking with him last year, after most of the machines had gone, and he informed me that a lot of cash had changed hands. It must have done, because he managed to refurbish the whole three-roomed arcade with new carpet and loads of big modern machines. On top of that, he bought three brand new expensive top of the range cars, all with personalised number plates. So the dealer, whoever he was, paid out a very large sum to acquire those machines.

Next month we look at the Empire arcade in Mablethorpe, and the hidden secrets that arcade held.

Robert Rowland



Ahrens Marathon Cycle Race.

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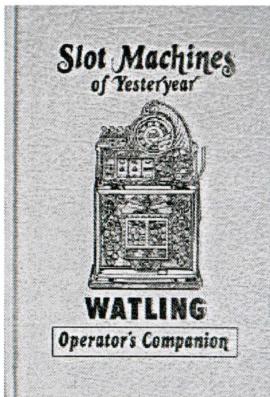
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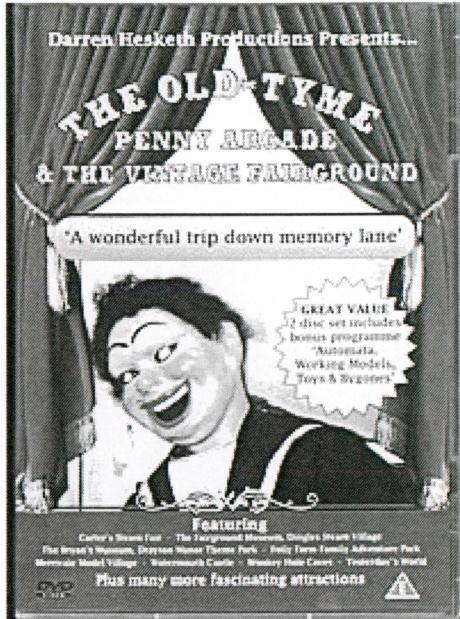
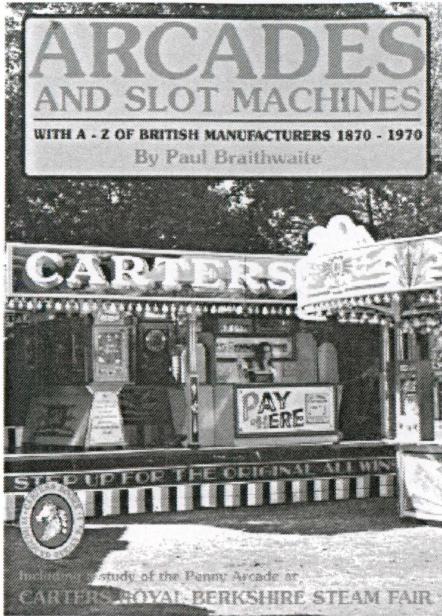
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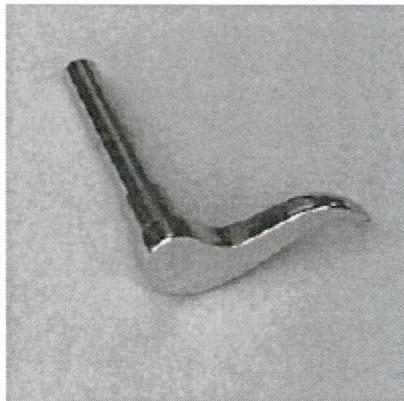
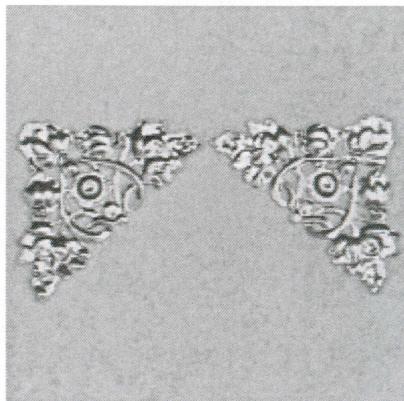
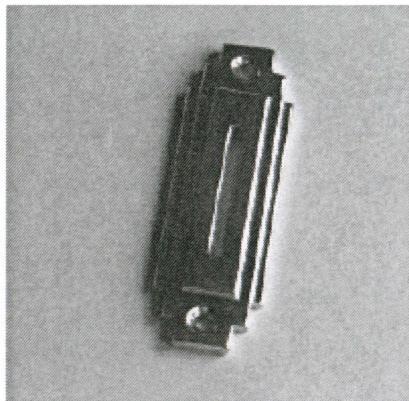
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